

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES

‘Looke in the place where he was wont to sit / See see his blood it is too manifest’: Domestic Space and Patriarchal Authority in *The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham* (1592)

Iman Sheeha

Brunel University London

iman.sheeha@brunel.ac.uk

The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham (1592) has been receiving considerable critical attention in recent years. This critical response has offered insightful readings of such aspects of the play as its engagement with social mobility,¹ the institution of marriage,² gender,³ anxieties surrounding domestic violence,⁴ and notions of privacy and domesticity.⁵ This paper takes leads from previous readings, especially those focusing on the play’s domestic aspects, extending them further and thus offering a new reading by focusing on the representation of the Ardens’ house as an extension of its

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¹ See Peter Berek. “‘Follow the Money’: Sex, Murder, Print, and Domestic Tragedy” *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 21 (2008), 170-188. [10 January 2018].

² See Catherine Belsey, ‘Alice Arden’s Crime’. The article later appeared as a chapter in *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985).

³ Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994); see also Julie R. Schutzman, ‘Alice Arden’s Freedom and the Suspended Moment of *Arden of Faversham*’ *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 36.2 (1996), 289-314. *JSTOR*. [3 December 2017].

⁴ See Betty S. Travitsky, ‘Husband-Murder and Petty Treason in English Renaissance Tragedy’ *Renaissance Drama*, New Series, 21 (1990), 171-198. *JSTOR*. [22 December 2017]; Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁵ See Viviana Comensoli, *Household Business: Domestic Plays of Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Catherine Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy in Early Modern England: The Material Life of the Household* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

master's identity and upholder of his domestic authority. In doing so, this article builds on notions of a perceived fear in the early modern period of the collapse of the normative gender order. Catherine Belsey, in her celebrated article on the play, has written that 'the institution of marriage [was] [...] publicly in crisis in the period', explaining that:

The institution most evidently in crisis was the monarchy, but it is also apparent that challenges to authority and authoritarianism were delivered in a number of spheres, many of them more obviously remote from the institution of monarchy than the more explicitly analogous institution of the family.⁶

The historian of the seventeenth-century, David Edward Underdown has also examined what he calls 'the crisis of order' in the years leading up to the English Civil War.⁷ This crisis, he explains, had its roots in such issues as explosive population growth, inflation, land shortage, vagrancy and poverty.⁸ 'Even the patriarchal family, the linch-pin of the whole structure of order', he observes, 'appeared to be threatened'.⁹ The misogynist literature pouring from pulpits and print houses, the obsession with scolds, witches, shrews and rebellious wives all suggested to Underdown that 'patriarchy could no longer be taken for granted' in the period.¹⁰ More recently, Susan D. Amussen, exploring 'unruly women' and 'failed patriarchs' in the early modern period, has observed that '[f]rom the top of society to the bottom, [...] the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-centuries are full of instances that suggest a collapsing patriarchal order'.¹¹ In light of Belsey's, Underdown's and Amussen's historically grounded arguments for a crisis faced by early modern patriarchy, the project of *The Tragedy of Master Arden of Favershams*, I argue, gains particular relevance and potency. In investing the house (the

⁶ Belsey, p. 101.

⁷ David Edward Underdown, 'The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England' in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. by Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 116-136 (p. 116).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 117.

¹¹ Susan D. Amussen and David E. Underdown, *Gender, Culture, and Politics in England, 1560-1640: Turning the World Upside Down*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 7. Not all historians, though, agree with this reading of early modern gender relations in the late sixteenth century, but most agree that there was a widespread sense of anxiety, if not a fully-fledged crisis, about gender relations in the period. See Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 21; Martin Ingram, "'Scolding Women Cucked or Washed": A Crisis in Gender Relations in Early Modern England?', *Women, Crime, and the Courts in Early Modern England*, ed. by Jennifer Kermode and Garthine Walker (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 48-80.

physical entity) with the agency to challenge and frustrate its mistress's (and her accomplices') claims to its ownership and with the power to align itself with its lawful patriarchal master by revealing his murder and ensuring the punishment of its perpetrators, the play engages with the contemporary anxiety about the instability of patriarchy. *Arden of Faversham* celebrates the permanence of patriarchal control, even in the face of the brutal elimination of the household head. The play reinforces Master Arden's rightful ownership of the household, its spaces as well as members.

Catherine Richardson has described the play as being 'strikingly material', explaining that 'it insists upon the significance of its locations, pointedly naming places and linguistically producing spaces on the stage. The place in which events occur generates, shapes, affects or complicates action'.¹² Taking a lead from Richardson, I want to focus on one such particular space that is invested with special importance and endowed with the agency to 'generate, shape and affect action' in the play, the Ardens' house. The house as both a physical entity and an ideological institution is placed at the centre of the play, turning into a character in its own right towards the end, as we shall see. The play dramatises the events that lead up to Master Arden's murder, paying close attention to the space of the house and making striking use of contemporary notions of the identity of the head of the household being tightly knit to, and constituted in part by, the space of his house. It stages Master Arden's battle to control his household and thus assert his identity as master, husband and, by extension, a representative of patriarchy in control, a battle that the house, in the final analysis, wins for him.

When Master Arden is first introduced in scene 1, he is constructed as neither the master of his household nor the king of his domestic kingdom, as householders were constructed in contemporary early modern conduct literature ('he is as a king in his owne house', William Gouge wrote in 1622, for example).¹³ Scene 1 opens with laying out the situation of domestic disorder and household misrule engulfing Master Arden's household: he has failed in governing his house properly, and this failure is registered in the loss of his authority over his wife. As Elizabeth Williamson has written, '[w]hen he chooses to tolerate the affair between Alice and Mosby, Arden abdicates his proper role in the household and, quite literally, leaves the door open for Alice's betrayal'.¹⁴ He is introduced to the audience complaining to his close friend about the situation of his

¹² Richardson, p. 104.

¹³ William Gouge, *Of domesticall duties eight treatises* (London, 1622). *Early English Books Online*. STC (2nd ed.) / 12119, sig. S1v.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Williamson, 'The Uses and Abuses of Prayer Book Properties in *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, and *Arden of Faversham*', *English Literary Renaissance* 39.2 (2009), 371-395 (p. 392) *JSTOR*. Web. 23 Nov. 2017.

household, the usurpation of his place in the domestic hierarchy and the threat this has posed to his identity as a respectable householder:

Loue letters past twixt Mosbie and my Wyfe,
And they have previe meetings in the Towne
Nay on his finger did I spy the Ring,
Which at our Marriage day the Preest put on (sig. A2r).¹⁵

Arden's reference to the 'previe meetings' that he claims his wife enjoys with her lover taking place, significantly, in the town stresses the sense of his loss of authority over his wife registered in her abandonment of her house and wandering about town with her lover. A disciplined housewife, contemporary writers on the domestic insisted, however unrealistically, was one who stayed home. John Dod and Robert Cleaver, to cite one example, equate the very term 'housewife' with this domestication of the wife: 'wee call the wife Huswife, that is, house-wife, not a street-wife, one that gaddeth vp and downe'.¹⁶ The play stresses this sense of loss of authority over the household and the usurpation of the place of its head through the reference to the wedding ring Master Arden says he saw on Mosby's finger which visually renders his identity as husband redundant.

Importantly, this usurpation is embodied in spatial terms: Mosby's violation of the marital body is replicated in his violation of the domestic space epitomised in the authority he is invited by Mistress Arden to enjoy over it. By the end of the long scene 1, the two senses of usurpation are encapsulated in Mosby's request addressed to Mistress Arden that now 'M. Arden is from home, / Youle give me leave to play your husbands part' (sig. C3r). Playing the husband's 'part', Frank Whigham writes, might 'refer to the woman's part, a sexual wish'.¹⁷ However, Mistress Arden's reply leaves no doubt about the entanglement of the two senses of 'part', genital and spatial: 'Mosbie',

¹⁵ *The Lamentable and True Tragedie of M. Arden of Feversham in Kent* (London: Edward White, 1592). All textual references are taken from this edition.

¹⁶ Robert Cleaver and John Dod, *A Godly forme of houshold gouernment*, (London: Felix Kingston, 1598), STC (2nd ed.) / 5383, sig. O8r. This rigid spatial separation of the husband and wife has been exposed as unrealistic and impractical in early modern society. See Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History,' *The Historical Journal* 36.2 (1993), 383-414; Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 27; Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1996), 14, 26.

¹⁷ Frank Whigham, *Seizures of the Will in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 85.

she explains, ‘you know whose [*sic*] maister of my hart, / He well may be the master of the house’ (sig. C3r). As Michael Neill holds, ‘[s]exual and social “part”, wife’s body and husband’s estate become at this point absolutely interchangeable’.¹⁸ Significantly, Mosby’s parallel invasion of house and marriage is introduced early on as leaving a mark on Master Arden’s body, the lover’s name is engraved on the man’s brow, a badge of shame, for all to see: ‘Mosbies name, a scandale unto myne / Is deeply trenched in my blushing brow’ (sig. D4r).¹⁹ This reference to the violation of Master Arden’s body introduces the theme that will be elaborated upon throughout the play with increasing intensity: the oneness of master and house. This association is made possible in this early image through the careful word choice. Contemporary connotations for the verb ‘trench’, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, all revolve around material objects and hard surfaces, ground or lands, being penetrated, violated, cut, or severed (I.1, II.3). The use of ‘trench’ in connection with the male human body, particularly the soft area of the brow, alludes to the fusion between the master and the solid surfaces of his violated house, on which more to follow.

Mosby’s spatial usurpation of Master Arden’s identity is visualised most strikingly in the murder scene, scene 14, when Mosby is carefully placed before the murder is carried out in Master Arden’s chair, while the husband is made by his wife to ‘sit upon a stoole’ to make it easier for the concealed hired killers to reach him from behind unseen (sig. P3v). This act of usurpation of the master’s seat is stressed once again after the success of the murderous plot when Mistress Arden, receiving her dinner guests, asks Mosby to ‘sit you in my husbands seat’ (sig. I2r). Unsurprisingly, the new master’s identity as householder is yet again imagined in domestic terms and constructed in relation to the spatiality of the house and its material furnishings: it is through his occupation of the ‘seat’ reserved for the head of the household that Mosby’s new identity as master is hoped to be verified. Mosby himself, fantasising about a future following the successful murder of Master Arden, imagines his mastery of the household and its effect on his accomplices in identical terms: ‘when they shall see me sit in Ardens seat, / They wil insult upon me for my mede’ (sigs. E3v-E4r). The occupation of the one chair that the play mentions is made the more significant by the fact that, typically, the early modern house, as Lena Cowen Orlin’s research reveals, had only one chair and this ‘was

¹⁸ Michael Neill, *Putting History to the Question: Power, Politics, and Society in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 68-9.

¹⁹ This badge of shame almost replicates the early modern popular practice of marking a whore’s face by slitting her nose, making her sin, in effect, visible for all to see. For fascinating speculations on the meanings of the slit nose, see Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 103.

reserved for the master of the house and associated with his enthronement'.²⁰ Other members of the household usually sat on 'stools or forms', as James Ayres's research shows.²¹ Similarly, Catherine Richardson and Tara Hamling's more recent work on the furnishings of early modern middling households confirms that the ownership of chairs was a significant marker of status at the middling sorts' level.²²

Faced by this situation of displacement and loss of identity, Master Arden strives to re-assert his authority, significantly, through evoking mastery over the household and its spaces. In doing so, he enters into a contest with his wife and her lover to claim the house as his to control and, by extension, to verify his identity as master. Master Arden's idea of punishing Mosby's transgression is tightly connected with the house; his sense of re-asserting his identity as master of the household is closely linked to its interior spaces: 'that injurious ribald that attempts / To violate my dear wife's chastity', he threatens as he vents his frustration to his friend,

[s]hall on the bed which he thinks to defile,
See his dissevered joints and sinewes torne,
Whylst on the planchers, pants his weary body,
Smeard in the channels of his lustfull bloode (sig. A2v).

The fact that Arden's words end up being prophetic with the twist that *he* turns out to be the victim of murder whose setting is the house, the one whose body is smeared in his blood, stresses the sense of cut-throat competition between the two men for the occupation of the one position of household master. It 'mark[s] the resemblance of the characters', in Whigham's words, the identical aim of domestic mastery they share.²³ Moreover, Master Arden attempts to regain his identity by practicing the authority over domestic servants with which contemporary commentators on the household invested the householder. Learning by chance of his servant Michael's desire for the maid, Susan, he confiscates a love letter Michael intends to send to his beloved, threatening: 'come I once at home, / Ile rouse her from remaining in my house' (sig. D1r). Arden is

²⁰ Orlin, p. 93. I agree with Orlin that the chair is charged with weighty significance as a symbol of domestic authority and that Wine's observation that this detail is "an interesting commentary, so it seems, on the sparse furnishings of even a well-to-do Elizabethan gentleman's household" perhaps misses the point. See M. L. Wine (ed.), *The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham* (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 117.

²¹ James Ayres, *Domestic Interiors: The British Tradition, 1500-1850* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 174.

²² Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, *A Day at Home in Early Modern England: Material Culture and Domestic Life, 1500-1700* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 123.

²³ Whigham, p. 75.

tapping here into the conventional discourse that equipped the domestic king with ‘authoritie ouer all’, to quote the contemporary influential moralist William Gouge.²⁴ This exercise of domestic authority over servants is yet again, and unsurprisingly, one aspect of the competition between Master Arden and Mosby to rule the household. The same maidservant, Susan, is given orders by Mosby right after the murder is successfully carried out, as if he were her master, the nature of the domestic task he commands and the perversion of everyday, quotidian domestic duties it entails speaking to his transgression and violation of the household. Observing bloodstains on the floor of the house following the murder, Mosby orders the maidservant to ‘strew rushes on it, can you not’, complaining like a frustrated master who finds the inefficiency of his domestic servant unbearable: ‘This wench doth nothing fall unto the worke’ (sig. I1v).

Arden’s attempt to re-assert his position of domestic authority culminates in his vying with his wife to control the interior spaces of the house by opening them up to guests he chooses to allow in. Scene 14 economically stages this competition for household control: contesting the inclusion of Mosby as a guest in the household, Master and Mistress Arden embark on a verbal battle the thrust of which is a question about who the master of the household is. Master Arden asks his wife to ‘bid him [the guest] welcome’ (sig. H4v). Mistress Arden, however, pretending to refuse Mosby’s company because it ‘hath purchased me ill freends’, pledges ‘never [to] frequent it more’ (sigs. H4v-I1r). Master Arden will not have it so. He insists on her welcoming his guest: ‘Now he is here you wil not serve me so’ (sig. H4v). Against Mistress Arden’s increasing protestation against Mosby’s presence in the house, Master Arden uses more imperatives, insisting on the two sharing a drink, ‘[y]ou shal beginne’, he orders his wife, ‘frowne not, Ile have it so’ (sig. H4v). The contest culminates in an explicit claim of mastery over the house: Mistress Arden, challenging her husband’s attempt to ‘make them freends’ (sig. H4v), orders Mosby to ‘frequent my house no more’ (sig. I1r). Significantly, the possessive phrase she uses, ‘my house’, is picked up only five lines later by her husband, who states in reply to Mosby’s (fraudulent) oath to leave Faversham: ‘Ile have no such vowes made in my house’ (sig. I1r). The phrase, strikingly, re-surfaces after the murder of Master Arden in scene 14, when Mistress Arden, believing she has cleaned the house of all incriminating evidence, including sending the body of her husband away into the fields, states: ‘My house is cleare, and now I feare them [figures of authority arriving to investigate the house] not’ (sig. I3r).

In what proves to be his last attempt at re-gaining his identity as householder, Master Arden invites notables to dinner in his house. This is an exercise of hospitality which

²⁴ Gouge, sig. S1v.

constituted an important aspect of a good householder's identity. The anonymous author of the dialogue on *Cyvile and Uncyvile Life* (1579) has the countryman who stands for traditional values explain that:

the Country custome is, to bid every man welcome, and the more resort he hath, the more is the Maister of the house honored, and the more authority a Gentleman hath in the shier, the more is the resort unto him.²⁵

Hospitality is understood here as not only conferring honour on the householder, but also registering his authority within the wider rural community – the more people benefiting from his hospitality, the more his honour and good name are reinforced. Julia Reinhard Lupton has written about the theatricality inherent in hospitality, pointing out that ‘the dramatic character of hospitality [...] weds it fundamentally to theatricality’.²⁶ Seen in this light, Master Arden's attempt is a performance he sets up before the community he belongs to, announcing that he is in control of his household. It is a stage on which he wishes to announce and perform his domestic mastery. Though the dinner that Master Arden offers is not a banquet, it still perhaps taps into the contemporary discourse surrounding banquets that Catherine Richardson explores, stating that the banquet ‘offers a [...] moment of great social formality and order’, thus serving in domestic plays, like *The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham*, to ‘provid[e] a richly ironic context for deceit, betrayal and death’.²⁷ The irony here underlying the façade of control and domestic order that Master Arden aims at creating with this meal is that the house, by the time the guests arrive for dinner, is already penetrated and violated by rival claimants to authority over its spaces and the identity Master Arden is trying to construct is deeply challenged. When Master Arden arrives to entertain his dinner guests, Mistress Arden has already given her orders that revolve around mastery of domestic space. She has concealed the two assassins she paid generously to murder Arden in the counting house (scene 14), a very socially exclusive and intimate domestic space, as Viviana Comensoli teaches us.²⁸ Furthermore, Mistress Arden's bid to control the house materialises in this scene in her instruction to the servant Michael to ‘lock the

²⁵ Quote from Felicity Heal, ‘The Idea of Hospitality in Early Modern England’, *Past and Present* 102.1 (1984), 66-93 (p. 74). In the same vein, in *The house-holder or, Perfect man* (London, 1610), Edward Topsell urged householders not to ‘forsake strangers, for the Lord loveth them and goeth with them’ (sig. M8v).

²⁶ Julia Reinhard Lupton, ‘Hospitality’ in *Early Modern Theatricality*, ed. by Henry S. Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 423-41 (p. 424).

²⁷ Catherine Richardson, *Shakespeare and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 142.

²⁸ Comensoli, p. 91.

streete doore' (sig. P4r), thus, in Catherine Richardson's words, exercising control over 'who can enter through the front door'.²⁹ More significantly, she has re-arranged the usual seating around the backgammon table, placing her husband on a stool and Mosby on the master's chair (sig. P3v), a gesture highly symbolic given the uniqueness of the master's chair, as discussed above, and one that the playwright re-visits in the discovery scene to important ends, as we shall see. This detail about the change in the usual seating arrangements in the Ardens' house gains particular importance by the fact that it is, among others, the playwright's own invention and does not have its origin in the source, the report of the crime in Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*. In Holinshed, at this point of the story, Mosby is simply said to have 'sate downe on the bench'.³⁰

Mistress Arden's re-arrangement of domestic objects and furnishings aimed at placing her lover in her husband's seat is significant from another perspective as well. Given the play's concern with the disruption of patriarchal authority in the Ardens' household, it is particularly important that Mistress Arden's subversive action takes shape in relation to 'household stuff', in Natasha Korda's words.³¹ Korda has explored early modern anxieties surrounding the household mistress's role as a 'keeper of household stuff', the one entrusted with looking after domestic items 'as if they were her own'.³² These anxieties, Korda concluded, were epitomised in the possibility that the mistress, in her proprietary and supervisory role, unsupervised by her husband, was in a position to appropriate these items placed under her control or, even more subversively, pass them on to her lover: 'The housewife's role as keeper could be threatening to patriarchal authority'.³³ This is exactly the situation that the play stages: Mistress Arden avails herself of the authority invested in her as keeper and supervisor of household stuff to shift the dynamics of authority within the household and re-shuffle domestic objects in a way that benefits her lover and undermines, eventually eliminating, her husband. This tableau iconising the subversion of the housewife's supervisory role over domestic stuff makes visible and renders material her earlier promise to Mosby in scene I that her 'saving husband hoordes up bagges of gould, / To make our children rich' (sig. B1r). 'Our' could, of course, refer to the Ardens' children (of whom the play makes no other

²⁹ Catherine Richardson, 'Tragedy, Family and Household' in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy* ed. by Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17-29 (p. 23).

³⁰ Holinshed's account of the murder is reproduced in M. L. Wine (ed.), *The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham* (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 148-59 (p. 155).

³¹ Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 12.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

mention). However, I would argue that it is the future children that Mistress Arden fantasises about having with Mosby that are referred to here as the eventual beneficiaries of her husband's careful and painstaking industry. The play literalises the same sense of Mistress Arden's perverted use of her relationship to domestic spaces in scene I when she reminds Mosby of a time when she 'lockt the[e] in my closet' and there '[d]ecree[d] to murder Arden in the night' (sig. A4v). Mistress Arden's perversion of the space of the closet is particularly significant not only because closets, as Orlin's research shows, were spaces that could be 'closed', suggesting privacy,³⁴ but also because, as Richardson argues, they were socially exclusive spaces, ones that 'materialize[d] hierarchies by keeping servants, for example, out'.³⁵ Whether Mosby is offered the householder's chair to sit in, the money that Master Arden is making with which to maintain his future children with Mistress Arden or the intimate and private domestic space of the closet, he is depicted as a transgressor, and his transgression is enabled and facilitated by Mistress Arden's perverted housewifery.

Perhaps the most telling sign of contest for mastery over this house is the way domestic keys pass between hands as the murderous plot nears fruition: in the murder scene, the keys of the counting house door pass from Mistress Alice to the assassins, Black Will and Shakebag, so they could let themselves into the space as they wait for the right moment to attack Master Arden (sig. P3v). Another set of keys, the street door keys, passes from Mistress Arden to the servant Michael's hands (so he may lock the door after his master's arrival in accordance with his mistress's orders) (sig. P4r). This circulation of house keys between hands that have no right to handle them (servants and outsiders) and its symbolic representation of a household caught in a fierce battle for control that has almost left it masterless gains special significance when read in light of contemporary discourses about the exclusivity and uniqueness of keys. In this period, house keys only 'existed in single copies for outer doors',³⁶ and few interior 'locks had duplicate keys'.³⁷ The purpose of this practice, Amanda Vickery observes, was to enable the householder to 'control access to the house and its recesses'.³⁸ An early modern writer, offering advice on how best to govern and organise domestic affairs and spaces, explains the practice: 'One key to two locks, if it breake is a grieve, / two keyes

³⁴ Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Gertrude's Closet' in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 134 (1998), 44-67 (p. 55).

³⁵ Richardson *Shakespeare and Material Culture*, p. 114.

³⁶ Orlin *Private Matters*, p. 185.

³⁷ Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2007), p. 51.

³⁸ Amanda Vickery, 'An Englishman's Home is his Castle? Thresholds, Boundaries and Privacies in the Eighteenth-Century London House' *Past and Present* 199 (2008), 147-173 (p. 168).

to one locke in the ende is a thiefe'.³⁹ In short, unique house keys handled by the householder 'guaranteed a monopoly of control'.⁴⁰ The handling of the Ardens' house keys by outsiders and inferiors within the household speaks eloquently to the disorder rampant in the household and to the usurpation of its master's place.

Against these rival claims on the domestic space, the play allows the house itself as a physical entity to take sides. Lena Cowen Orlin has written that 'the play embodies a house yielding up its secrets to observers'.⁴¹ While this is certainly the case, more is at stake than a simple revelation of a murder. By refusing to conceal its clues, by declining to 'swallow up this Ardens bloode', as one of the murderers puts it (sig. D2v), the house declares its allegiance to the one master that contemporary theorisation on the domestic recognised. Embodying contemporary conceptions of the house as constituting part of the identity of the early modern man, the house in the play becomes organically fused with its master. Such contemporary conceptions underpin assertions such as the following made in 1589: 'wee doe not call any a yeoman till he be married, and have children, and as it were, have some authoritie among his neighboures'.⁴² The household invested the man with public authority.

Equally relevant is the concept of the 'embodied home', examined recently by Ariane M. Balizet, a commonplace of early modern thinking which imagines the house as a body whose head is its master.⁴³ While metaphorical, as Balizet argues, 'the rhetoric of the embodied home was not always an abstraction; on stage, in particular, the domestic body took material form in the figure of the husband'.⁴⁴ The play's subscription to these ideas of the embodied house is nowhere clearer than when Master Arden is silenced and his authority erased by murder. The house becomes an extension of the master's body, his tongue, revealing truths that the man can no longer speak. Following the murder, it is the house that enables the discovery of the domestic crime, its spaces literally throwing up clues and signs that lead the investigators and local authorities to piece together the picture of the crime. After the murder has been accomplished, Mistress Arden applies herself energetically to cleaning the floor stained with Master Arden's

³⁹ Thomas Tusser, *Fiue hundreth points of good husbandry vnited to as many of good huswiferie* (London, 1573). *Early English Books Online*. STC (2nd ed.) / 24376, sig. U2r.

⁴⁰ Vickery, p. 168.

⁴¹ Orlin *Private Matters*, p. 9.

⁴² Thomas Smith, *The commonwelth of England* (London: John Windet, 1589). *Early English Books Online*. STC (2nd ed.) / 22859, sig. F1v.

⁴³ Ariane M. Balizet, *Blood and Home in Early Modern Drama: Domestic Identity on the Renaissance Stage*, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 72.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 69.

blood before the Mayor and the Watch arrive to inspect the house. Her attempts, however, prove futile, for '[t]he bloode cleaveth to the ground and will not out', as her maid observes (sig. I1v). Mistress Arden's frantic attempt to force the blood out by scratching the floor 'with my nailes' in response to her maid's observation only succeeds in producing more bleeding: 'the more I strive', she throws her hands up exasperatedly, 'the more the blood appears' (sig. I1v) and later on '[i]n vaine we strive, for here his blood remains' (sig. I1v).⁴⁵ This detail is another of the playwright's own inventions and is thus a conscious alteration of his source that merits close examination.⁴⁶ The sense of blood gushing forth from the floor of the house as it gets scratched and 'scraped' (sig. I1v) makes the metaphor of the embodied house, its intimate connection with the body of its head visible and literal. Just as Master Arden's 'leaky corpse',⁴⁷ the house itself becomes a leaky surface, bleeding under Mistress Arden's frantic attempt to conceal the traces of the crime. Furthermore, the detail conjures up the image of a body bleeding under the violence of attacking nails. This replacement of the bleeding house of Master Arden's bleeding body becomes more striking when considered in light of the play's insistent representation of Master Arden as a Christ figure.⁴⁸ Sarah Youngblood, studying the imagery of the play, has written that it is 'surcharged with religious images'.⁴⁹ These images have the construction of

⁴⁵ Earlier critics have read the futility of Alice's attempt to wash the blood away in terms of divine providence. This is a relevant reading, given the play's portrayal of divine intervention offering Master Arden's murder as a warning of the end of avarice, as the Epilogue states, pointing out the way 'in the grasse his bodyes print was seene, / Two yeeres and more after the deede was done' (sig. K1v). However, this reading does not take account of the play's preoccupation with the domestic and ignores the agency of the house. See Keith Sturgess, *Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies* (Middlesex: Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 12, 30; Leanore Lieblein, 'The Context of Murder in English Domestic Plays, 1590-1610' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 23.2 (1983), 181-196. *JSTOR*. [27 Nov. 2017] (p. 183); Mary Floyd-Wilson, 'Arden of Faversham: Tragic Action at a Distance.' in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy* ed. by Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 188-99. Schutzman reads the stain 'as a sign of guilt over which she [Alice] has no control' in direct contrast to the wife's inability to blush and thus her failure to admit her guilt (310).

⁴⁶ In Raphael Holinshed, erasing blood left by the body is not problematic at all; the source reports that, apparently effortlessly, 'they [the accomplices] made cleen the Parlor, tooke a cloute, and wiped where it was bloody' (sig. Mmmmb1v). No corresponding interaction between Mistress Arden and a blood-producing floor is found in the source material.

⁴⁷ Balizet, p. 74.

⁴⁸ Of course, the representation of Master Arden as a Christ figure is contradicted by the play's depiction of him elsewhere as rapacious landlord and greedy landowner. For the play's representation of Master Arden as ambivalent, see Wine, ed., *Arden*, lxix.

⁴⁹ Sarah Youngblood, 'Theme and Imagery in *Arden of Faversham*' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. 3:2 (1963), 207-18 (p. 212) *JSTOR*. Web. 25 Nov. 2017.

Master Arden as Christ, as a 'sacrificial victim', in Balizet's words,⁵⁰ at their centre.⁵¹ The servant Michael, for example, having been threatened by the hired assassins to go ahead and make good his promise to help murder his master, laments Master Arden's tragic fate, apostrophising him as a 'lambe', a 'harmeles' one, whose 'gentle lyfe is leveld at', evoking Christ as the Paschal Lamb (sig. D3v). Master Arden himself recounts a nightmare in which he imagines himself as a 'deare' hunted by herdsmen (sig. E2v). Master Arden's blood detected on the floor by the Mayor is explained away by Mistress Arden in terms of the symbolism of the communion as 'a cup of Wine that Michael shed' (sig. I4r). Perhaps more strikingly, Master Arden is imagined as a Christ figure in his own wife's speech of repentance delivered in scene 16, where she taps into the discourse of Resurrection, inviting the dead man to '[r]yse up swete Arden' (sig. I4v). This construction of Master Arden as a Christ figure lends the image of the bleeding house special force: while the audience does not see the man's body bleeding (there is no description in the murder scene of a blood soaked corpse or of blood gushing forth from wounds as the murderers thrust their weapons into their victim's body), it is the house that bleeds on its master's behalf, testifying to its being an extension of his identity and aligning itself with him to the detriment of all other claims for ownership.

The play further registers the sense of oneness of man and house by staging a scene strikingly similar to the one with the bleeding house thus visually pairing house and master. Scene 16 incorporates similar elements, notably action on the part of Mistress Arden that invites bleeding, but this time with the body replacing the stubborn floor. Kneeling before the body of her husband and offering a speech of repentance, Mistress Arden observes about the body stretched before her: 'The more I sound his name, the more he bleedeth' (sig. I4v). The sentence structure employed here, identical to Mistress Arden's earlier exasperated cry ('The more I strive the more the blood appears' [sig. I1v]), uttered in relation to the reaction of the floor to her action, and the description of bleeding in response to her acts stress the parallel between man and house. This scene, moreover, highlights the human qualities attributed to non-human beings, thus lending more power to the notion of a speaking house that acts to prevent the successful concealment of its master's murder.⁵² 'In stating that the blood speaks to her with

⁵⁰ Balizet, p. 74.

⁵¹ The play is, however, ambivalent in its depiction of Master Arden and he is not unequivocally presented as an unwitting and innocent victim. For an exploration of Master Arden's portrayal as culpable in his own demise, see Lieblein, pp. 184-5.

⁵² Examining the play's engagement with the contemporary shift land underwent from being fraught with social significance to becoming a commodity, Garrett A. Sullivan in 'Arden Lay Murdered in That Plot of Ground: Surveying, Land, and *Arden of Faversham*' *English Literary History* 61: 2 (1994), 231-52. [12

condemnations and questions’, as Mary Floyd-Wilson puts it, ‘Alice implies that Arden’s dead body not only expresses thoughts and emotions but also responds to her passions’.⁵³ In fact, Mistress Arden reads the cruentation, the bleeding corpse, she witnesses as an incriminating speech directed at her, likening the bleeding wounds to a speaking mouth: ‘This bloode condemnes me, and in gushing foorth / Speakes as it falles, and askes me why I did it’ (sig. I4v).

Against all claims for ownership, the house chooses its master, aligning itself with Master Arden. Appropriating Master Arden’s tongue, it reveals the murder, offering up to the probing eyes of local authorities the signs and clues it refused to conceal earlier: ‘Looke in the place where he was wont to sit. / See see his blood it is too manifest’, cries the Mayor pointing at the blood-stained floor (sigs. I3v-I4r). In a striking change of detail, Master Arden’s blood is said to stain the ‘place where he was wont to sit’, as opposed to the place where he was actually made to sit before his murder, as discussed above, on a stool so Mosby could sit in the master’s ‘wonted place’, the chair, thus enabling the murderers to creep forward from the counting house unseen by Arden (sig. P3v). This intentional change of the usual domestic seating arrangement, which was explicitly spelt out in scene 14, would logically suggest that, when murdered, Arden will *not* bleed in his ‘wonted’ seating place, but rather in the place where he was made to sit on this occasion – on and by the stool. The change of location could, of course, be a result of careless composition. However, if intentional, this is a significant detail that empowers the house and gives it agency to challenge its mistress’s actions and frustrate her plans to supplant its master. Rejecting the new arrangement, and by extension, refusing to accept Mosby as its master, the house displays Master Arden’s blood in the place where the master used to sit, affirming the space as his and standing up for his right, and his alone, to occupy the chair while asserting the permanence of patriarchal authority even when its representative in the play has been eliminated.

Enhancing the oneness of house and master, just as the house retains elements of Master Arden’s body, the master’s body retains elements of the house: ‘in his slipshoe’, one of those examining the body asserts, ‘did I finde some rushes. / Which argueth he was murthred in this roome’ (sig. I3v). The organic incorporation of the house into its master’s identity could not be clearer. By the end of the play, the head of the household’s claim to domestic authority is verified and his indissoluble connection with

Dec. 2017] reads similar acts of agency on the part of the land in *Arden of Faversham*. Focusing on such details offered in the Epilogue as the land’s retention of the imprint of Master Arden’s body for two years, he describes it as ‘register[ing] its protest in a way that insists upon its interpenetration with the human: its indignation takes the form of a silhouette of a body’ (p. 248).

⁵³ Floyd-Wilson, p. 191.

the house as extension of his identity is validated, disappointing all other claims. Patriarchal authority triumphs through house and master becoming one figure, and Master Arden regains his control over his household even in death.